



STATE OF CONNECTICUT

DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH

Criteria for Submitting Specimens for Influenza PCR Testing to the State of Connecticut Department of Public Health Laboratory (10/15/2012)

UPDATE:

To ensure that novel influenza types, subtypes, and strains circulating in Connecticut are quickly identified, the Department of Public Health (DPH) has established criteria for submitting specimens for influenza testing by the DPH Laboratory. These criteria have been developed for the 2012-13 influenza season, which officially began on Sunday, September 30, 2012. They will remain until further notice.

The DPH has been following reports throughout the summer from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) of human infections with novel influenza viruses including an influenza A (H3N2) variant or “H2N2v” and other related viruses. The majority of these cases occurred in children less than 18 year of age and individuals who have been exposed to swine (pigs). While hospitalized patients and health care workers with influenza-like illness (ILI*) remain the priority groups for testing, the DPH laboratory will be accepting nasopharyngeal swabs from selected non-hospitalized cases including persons with a history of contact with swine during the two weeks prior to onset of illness and outbreaks under public health investigation *if approved by the DPH Epidemiology and Emerging Infections Program at 860-509-7994 prior to submitting specimens to the laboratory.* The DPH may update these criteria as the season progresses.

* Definition of influenza-like illness (ILI): Fever $>37.8^{\circ}\text{C}$ (100°F) plus cough or sore throat

The sensitivity of rapid influenza diagnostic tests (RIDTs) and direct immunofluorescence assays (DFAs) are lower than real-time reverse transcriptase polymerase chain reaction (rRT-PCR) tests and viral culture (http://www.cdc.gov/flu/professionals/diagnosis/clinician_guidance_ridt.htm). A negative RIDT or DFA result does not rule out influenza virus infection. Moreover, these tests cannot distinguish between influenza A subtypes, such as the 2009 H1N1 or H3N2 influenza A viruses.

Please note that the DPH Laboratory has moved to 395 West Street, Rocky Hill, CT 06067. Please also note that the previously instituted, federal guidelines for specimen shipping remain in effect; specimens must be transported on ice or with ice packs. For submitters that meet the testing criteria, please call the DPH Virology Laboratory at [860-920-6662](tel:860-920-6662) (*note new number*) if you need assistance with shipping. Viral reference collection kits (VR-C) can be ordered from the DPH laboratory at [860-920-6674](tel:860-920-6674) or [860-920-6675](tel:860-920-6675). See additional specimen collection and shipping instructions on the following page.

When submitting specimens to the DPH Laboratory for rRT-PCR influenza testing, it is important that the entire Microbiology Testing Services form (OL-9B) is completed. In addition, the reason for testing, including symptoms and rapid flu test results, must be written in the “Comments” section. **Please include if the patient is hospitalized, a health care worker or has a history of exposure to swine.**

These forms are included in the DPH Laboratory VR-C kits or available on the DPH website at: http://www.ct.gov/dph/lib/dph/laboratory/labhome/forms/clinical_test_requisition_ol9b_fill.pdf

These criteria are subject to change based on the evolving nature of the influenza season.

VR-C Kit Collection Instructions

1. Remove all contents of the kit:
 - a. Microbiology Testing Services form (OL-9B)
 - b. M4-RT viral transport tube
 - c. Dacron sampling swab
 - d. Diagnostic Specimen mailer (sealable plastic bag, inner aluminum tube, outer fiberboard tube with the DPH Laboratory mailing address)
 - e. A copy of these instructions
2. Completely fill out the Microbiology Testing Services form (OL-9B)
3. Label the M4-RT with patient name, facility ID, source of specimen (nasopharyngeal, throat, etc.)
4. Obtain an appropriate respiratory specimen from patient using the Dacron swab.
5. Remove screw cap top from M4-RT viral transport tube.
6. Insert swab into the M4-RT vessel until swab touches the bottom. Break or cut off excess swab handle.
7. Discard excess swab handle.
8. Tightly screw the cap on top of M4-RT viral transport tube.
9. Reassemble the VR-C kit prior to shipping:
 - a. Place the M4-RT tube in the sealable plastic bag,
 - b. Seal the top of the plastic bag and insert this package into the inner aluminum tube,
 - c. Seal the inner aluminum tube using the matching screw cap,
 - d. Place the Microbiology Testing Services form (OL-9B) around the sealed aluminum tube and insert these items into the outer fiberboard mailing tube.
10. Since clinical specimens must be shipped cold in appropriate packaging per federal guidelines, place the mailing tubes in an insulated cold transport box.
11. Seal the cold transport box for shipping, being certain that the DPH Laboratory address is present.
12. Deliver the sealed cold transport box via courier or mail the box after attaching appropriate postage.